

Message Text

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15

ACTION AF-06

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INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOGADISCIO 0777

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, SO, UR

SUBJECT: ARAB JOURNALISTS VISIT TO BERBERA

REF: MOGADISCIO 0749

1. ARAB JOURNALISTS WHO VISITED BERBERA AND REPORTED NO RPT NO SOVIET BASES THERE (MOGADISCIO 749) DEPARTED MOGADISCIO MAY 31. EVENING BEFORE THEIR DEPARTURE LEADER OF DELEGATION MET WITH EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT RPT NOT YET PRIVY TO DETAILS OF THEIR CONVERSATION, WE UNDERSTAND FROM EGYPTIAN EMBASSY SOURCE THAT ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO PERSUADE JOURNALISTS TO REFRAIN FROM DRAWING ANY HASTY CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THEIR TRIP UPON RETURN TO CAIRO.

2. WE ALSO HAVE RECEIVED REPORT FROM SOMALI BUSINESSMAN WHO VISITED BERBERA MAY 26 AND 27 DESCRIBING MAY 24 VISIT OF ARAB JOURNALISTS. WHILE WE CANNOT RPT CANNOT VOUCH FOR ACCURACY OF REPORT NEVERTHELESS IT IS WORTH REPEATING, SINCE IT WEEMS TO REFLECT POPULAR VIEW, BOTH IN BERBERA AND HARGEISA, AS TO WHAT ACTUALLY TRANSPIRED DURING ARAB JOURNALISTS' VISIT TO BERBERA.

3. ACCORDING TO SOMALI SOURCE, SEVERAL DAYS PRIOR TO MAY 24 INSPECTION TRIP BY ARABS, SNA FIRST VICE COMMANDANT FADIL TOLD SOVIETS THAT ALL RUSSIAN SHIPS MUST BE REMOVED FROM BERBERA ON MAY 24. ALSO, SOVIET ADVISORS MUST NOT BE VISIBLE IN TOWN ITSELF.

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4. SOVIET SHIPS IN PORT AT TIME PUT OUT TO SEA, INCLUDING SOVIET BARRACKS SHIP, WHICH MOVED TO ANCHORAGE OFFSHORE BUT STILL IN VIEW OF PORT. SOMALI FLAG WAS DISPLAYED AND NUMBER OF SOMALI GUULWADAYAL OR PIONEERS WERE TAKEN ABOARD TO GIVE APPEARANCE OF SOMALI CREW TO OBSERVERS WITH BINOCULARS ON SHORE.

5. ARAB JOURNALISTS THUS SAW NO RPT NO SOVIET SHIPS AND NO SOVIET PERSONNEL. ARAB VISITORS WERE TAKEN ON QUICK TOUR OF CITY AND SAW LITTLE OF INTEREST. SOMALI HOSTS DID THEIR BEST TO RUSH THEM ALONG, SINCE THEY WERE SCHEDULED TO RETURN TO HARGEISA AND MOGADISCIO SAME DAY. ONLY TWO HOURS RESERVED FOR BERBERA TOUR, INCLUDING HOUR FOR LUNCH. AT CONCLUSION OF MOTOR TOURJF HOWEVER, ARAB JOURNALIST TOOK MAP OF BERBERA FROM POCKET AND ASKED TO SEE QTE BATALALA UNQTE A SECTION OF BERBERA WHICH MANY SOMALIS EVIDENTLY BELIEVE IS SITE OF SOVIET INSTALLATION.

6. SOMALI HOSTS TRIED TO PERSUADE ARAB GUESTS THAT BATALALA NOT RPT NOT WORTH THEIR TIME. ARABA WERE ADAMANT. SOMALIS CONTINUED TO STALL BUT FINALLY YIELDED.

7. WHILE SOMALIS WITH JOURNALISTS WERE STALLING VISITORS, INSTRUCTIONS WERE GIVEN TO SOMALI ARMY UNITS IN BERBERA TO ASSEMBLE TRUCKS AND MECHANICS IN ENCLOSURE FORMED BY BARBED WIRE OUTER FENCE AND INNER WALL AT BATALALA SITE. WHEN ARABS AND THEIR HOSTS FINALLY ARRIVED AND WERE ADMITTED TO BARBED WIRE ENCLOSURE, SNA TRUCKS WERE ARRAYED THERE, WITH HOODS LIFTED AND SNA MECHANICS WORKING AWAY. ENCLOSURE WAS IDENTIFIED AS SNA CAMP AND MOTOR POOL.

8. ARAB JOURNALISTS THEN ASKED TO SEE INSTALLATION WHICH LAY WITHIN WALLED ENCLOSURE BEYOND, WHERE IRON GATE WAS SHUT. SOMALIS TOLD THEM THAT THIS WAS CONSTRUCTION SITE WHERE BLASTING WAS GOING ON AND NO ONE COULD BE ADMITTED. TWO OF THREE JOURNALISTS CLIMBED ON TOP OF TRUCKS AND ONE PHOTOGRAPHER SHINNIED UP TREE TO GET CAMERA SHORT OF AREA WITHIN WALLED ENCLOSURE. LATTER IS AREA WHERE SOCIET CONSTRUCTION NOW GOING ON AND WHICH IS CLOSED TO PUBLIC. (FYI MANY SOMALIS FROM BERBERA EVIDENTLY BELIEVE THAT SOVIETS ARE ALSO BUILDING LARGE 700-BED HOSPITAL THERE FOR SOVIET NAVAL PERSONNEL IN INDIAN OCEAN UNITS. END FYI).

9. FOLLOWING BATALALA VISIT, ARAB JOURNALIST WITH MAP THEN ASKED TO
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SEE QTE NOBIA UNQTE, WHICH HE IDENTIFIED AS OLD BRITISH TRANSMITTER SITE. ARABS WERE THEN TAKEN TO NOBIA BUT SOMALI SOURCE HAD NO RPT NO INFO AS TO WHAT THEY SAW THERE.

10. SOMALI BUSINESSMAN REPORTED THAT PEOPLE IN BERBERA AND HARGEISA BOTH WERE AMUSED AT GAMES GSDR HAD PLAYED WITH ARAB JOURNALISTS AT BERBERA. AT MAY 27 TUESDAY NIGHT KAT SESSION IN HARGEISA, GSDR CIVIL SERVANT HAD DESCRIBED FOR HIM DETAILS OF ARAB JOURNALIST

VISIT TO BERBERA - REPEATING SAME SCENARIO HE HAD HEARD PREVIOUS DAY IN BERBERA ITSELF -- AND CONCLUDED THAT IT MADE NO RPT NO DIFFERENCE WHAT EVASIONS SIAD ATTEMPTED, US PRESIDENT FORD WOULD SIMPLY SEND ANOTHER SATELLITE OVER AND SHOW PHOTOGRAPHS TO PRES. SADAT AND KING KHALID. (WE DO NOT RPT NOT KNOW EXTENT TO WHICH LATTER SPECULATION IS COMMON IN GSDR BUREAUCRACY.)

11. SOMALI BUSINESSMAN IS PRO-WESTERN OBSERVER FROM NORTH, WITH BUSINESS INTERESTS IN DJIBOUTI AND BERBERA. NEVERTHELESS HIS REPORT IS NOT RPT NOT WITHOUT LOGIC, EVEN IF ONLY REFLECTS SOMALI PERCEPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED MAY 24 AT BERBERA.
HAMRICK

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